Atari News, Views, and Reviews!!

October 12, 1988

H.A.C.K. NEWS

HAPPY HALLOWEEN!!

The official newsletter for the Home Atari Computer Klub

From the Keyboard of Dave Taylor

As you may already know, I have taken over as editor-in-chief of the HACK newsletter. However, I haven't quite got the hang of this yet so things might be a bit different in the newsletter for a while until I do figure everything out. And for those of you who have modems, you may be aware of the fact that I am also an assistant co-sysop for the Atari SIG on the Salem Public Library's BBS. And if all this wasn't enough, I still have my own board, Cinderella BBS up on the phone lines over the weekends. There are several reasons why I decided to take on all this reponsibilty. The main reason being that I'm trying to impress the U.S. Navy so they'll pay for my college expenses via the NROTC scholarship program. But I'm not doing all this by myself. I am extremely grateful to Dan Johnson for all he has done and is doing for me. If it had not been for him, my BBS wouldn't exist, I wouldn't be cosysop on SPL, and I sure wouldn't be editor of this newsletter. THANX A LOT DAN!!!

Well, thatz all from my keyboard. I hope you like this newsletter. If you don't, I'll make you editor and you can do it from now on!!

AN NP-10 STAR REVIEW

About a month ago, I was looking for a high quality printer at a low quality price. After looking all over the country, I found one. It's discontinued, but very much still available. It's the Star Micronics NP-10 printer. Let's compare it to one of its rivals, the Panasonic 1080i and the NP-10's older brother, the NX-10.

Both the NP-10 and the 1080i have the same features. The NP-10 prints at 100 cps in draft and the 1080i at 120 cps. In NLQ mode, the NP-10 runs at 25 cps and the 1080i runs at 24 cps. The quality of print that each printer gives is also about equal. In fact, you're looking at the NP-10's NLQ quality.

The next feature (also, the deciding factor in my buying the NP-10) is the price. The Star NP-10 runs at a suggested retail price of $129.95. Whereas the Panasonic 1080i is about $195.95. And considering the interface I bought with the NP-10 goes for around $39.95, It turned out that I paid less for both the NP-10 and the interface (a Graphix AT+) I got with it than I would have paid for just the Panasonic 1080i without any interface. I saved about $20. So the main difference between the NP-10 and the 1080i is that you'd be paying about an extra $70 for an extra 20 cps worth of speed if you buy the 1080i. That is all.

Now, the difference between the NP-10 and its older brother, the NX-10, is that the NP-10 is a bit more user friendly and it also costs less. The NX-10 is a bit faster in terms of printing speed, but both are about the same in quality of print.

So in conclusion, the Star Micronics NP-10 printer complies with the Atari slogan- "Power without the price!" and I recommend that if you are looking for a high-quality printer with a low-quality price, get the Star Micronics NP-10 printer.

BENCHMARKING BASIC

Several past issues of the HACK NEWS have discussed some of the after-market BASICs available for the 8-bit Atari computers. We have discussed some of the pros and cons of using a BASIC other than that which came with the computer. We have seen that the larger number of commands and functions available in BASICs such as BASIC XL/XE or TURBO BASIC can be a great boon to the serious programmer but may be a burden to the typically casual programmer. We have noted that some, such as Atari's own MICROSOFT BASIC and the public domain TURBO BASIC are many times faster running than Atari BASIC but suffer from serious incompatibility problems in that they are generally upwardly compatible with the standard Atari BASIC but they are almost guaranteed not to run when downward compatibility is expected (Atari BASIC just won't run programs written in these two other dialects without major rewriting.) TURBO BASIC programs are easy to convert but MS BASIC programs are difficult.

We have also studied different benchmark results for some of these different BASICs. These tests, while not very scientific and of little real-world value, at least offer the prospective user a fixed standard of comparison. So, due to many requests (3 of them!), a new test has been performed and the results tabulated.

I started with a simple looping routine originally published in PC MAGAZINE about 3 years ago. The routine is as follows:

```
20 FOR X=1 TO 1000 STEP .5
30 Y=X^2.33456
40 PRINT X,Y
50 NEXT X
```

A timing subroutine using the system timers at memory locations 18, 19, and 20 was added to provide the results. The resulting program was converted to each dialect and then ran. The results were not surprising and are presented here, slowest to fastest:

ATARI "C" BASIC - 9.4 minutes
OSS BASIC XL/XE - 9.0 minutes
ATARI MS BASIC - 5.5 minutes
TURBO BASIC XL - 3.4 minutes
(all times rounded to the nearest tenth of a minute)

I think this test shows that Atari BASIC is a real slug in comparison to the others. Remember, they are all interpreted BASICs and program execution is seldom as simple as a benchmark may suggest. For example, in real-world execution times BASIC XL and XE are at least twice as speedy as Atari BASIC's. However, I was unable, in any test I performed, to make Atari BASIC quicker than last place until I compiled it!

BASIC XE is a special product for 130XE owners, or those with expanded 1200XL and 800XLs. Its memory-management enables the user to have 64K of BASIC program space AND 31K of data space for a total of 95K of user RAM! A little better than the 32K that most other BASICs leave you, isn't it!

If you can afford to buy BASIC XL ($50) or BASIC XE ($70), I heartily suggest that you do so. They are the best balance of compatibility and power and are well-supported. As an alternative TURBO BASIC XL runs a very close second...and it can be yours for the price of a HACK club disk ($3.00) or a download from any local Atari BBS. That makes it a heck of a value. Try it and you'll never want to switch back to the old SLOWPOKE Atari BASIC.

LOCAL BBS NUMBERS:

Popcorn School BBS: **585-9595**
Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays
7:00pm to **12:00**am
SysOp: Dick Dery

Cinderella BBS: **399-9861**
Fridays & Saturdays: **7:00**pm to **12:00**am
Sundays: **4:00**pm to **9:00**pm

Salem Public Library BBS: **588-6130**
588-6081
24 hours a day, 7 days a week!!

Beilke's BBS: **588-1891**
24 hours a day, 7 days a week!!

Renegade One: **390-3811**

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